

## Elbow Injury Advice

You have been diagnosed with an elbow injury. Even though there is no break in a bone on your X-ray, you still could have injured the soft tissues muscles, tendons or ligaments around your elbow.

Ligaments (which are strong tissues around joints attaching bones together and giving support to the joints) can be injured, usually by being stretched during a sudden pull, and this causes inflammation, swelling, and bleeding (bruising) around the affected joint.

During the first few days your elbow may be swollen and painful so a sling may have been provided to rest your elbow in a comfortable position for a few days.

In order to help the natural healing process, please follow the advice below.

<b>Things you should do</b>	<b>Things you should not do</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rest your elbow for the first 24/48 hours after your injury but avoid long spells of not moving at all,</li> <li>• Move your elbow gently for 10 to 20 seconds every hour when you are awake</li> <li>• If you have been given a sling, keep your elbow in it when moving around. When sitting you can rest your elbow in a comfortable position, such as on a cushion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use ice packs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ over areas of skin that are in poor condition</li> <li>○ if you have poor sensation to cold</li> <li>○ if you know you have poor circulation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Place ice packs directly onto your skin as they can burn.</li> <li>• Do not leave an icepack on while you are asleep</li> <li>• Do not use ice for more than 20 minutes at a time - you will not be helping heal your injury any faster, and you can cause damage to the tissue</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If your elbow is swollen use ice packs over your sling (frozen peas wrapped in a towel will do), for 15-20 minutes every 2 hours if you can.</li> <li>• Make sure you move your shoulder and wrist as well.</li> <li>• As the arm starts to feel more comfortable, gradually build up to heavier activities.</li> <li>• For those returning to sport, swimming is good exercise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not try to force your elbow to be straight - is likely to cause pain and delay your recovery.</li> <li>• Do not carry heavy objects, or strain the elbow initially for the first few weeks</li> <li>• Play contact or racquet sports until your elbow is free of pain and feels strong.</li> </ul>
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## Exercises

Remove your sling and exercise your shoulder, elbow, and wrist at least 4 times a day. It is important to keep gently moving the elbow as this will prevent stiffness and ensure the quickest return to normal use.

After 48 hours, try to use your arm more - exercise really helps your elbow and can relieve pain. Do whatever you normally would and stay at, or return to work - this is important and is the best way to get better. You may need to adapt how you do things initially.

As your pain settles you may want to remove the sling completely – this can be done as soon as you feel able. Your injury may take up to 6 weeks to settle.

Avoid sports or heavy lifting until you have less discomfort and good movement.

You may experience more discomfort when you start these exercises. However, this is normal and does not mean you should stop. If your symptoms remain worse for more than 2 hours after the exercises then you should decrease the number of each exercise that you do and build up again slowly. The exercises below will help you to regain full function, flexibility and strength. You should try to practice these 10 times, 3 to 4 times every day. Add an extra 1 or 2 repetitions every few days as long as you feel comfortable.

### Exercise 1

Sit with your forearm on a table.  
Start with your palm up and then turn it downwards keeping your elbow still.  
Feel the stretch and hold for 10 seconds and slowly release.  
Do this 10 times repeating 3 - 4times a day



### Exercise 2

Stand up. Bend your elbow up towards you as far as possible.  
Feel it stretching and hold this for 10 seconds.  
Now straighten it out as far as you are able, but do not force it.  
Feel the stretch and hold for 10 seconds.  
Do this 10 times repeating 3-4 times a day.

**Fig 1**



**Fig 2**



If you are not able to do this because your elbow is too stiff, grasp the wrist of the affected arm and gently help to bend then straighten it with your other hand (fig 2).

Feel the stretch and hold for 10 seconds.  
Start by doing 10 repetitions of each exercise, 3 -4 times a day.

### Exercise 3

Lean against a wall with your fingers turned upwards.  
Slowly try to straighten your elbow, pushing your hand into the wall. Hold for 30 seconds then release.  
Repeat 3 times



## When can I return to normal activities?

If you participate in an active hobby then it is advised that you do not return to this until you have full strength, full range of movement and you can use your elbow normally without experiencing pain or swelling. If you play a sport, practice specific activities like throwing a ball to prepare the elbow. Build these activities up gradually before returning to full training sessions and competition.

## What should I take for pain?

No pain relief may be needed if the sprain is mild. However painkillers, such as **Paracetamol**, are useful to ease pain, but it is best to take them regularly for a few days or so rather than every now and then.

They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you do not take any other product containing Paracetamol.

**With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully.**

**Anti-inflammatory painkillers** can also be used. These relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you should not use them.

Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either.

You can buy Ibuprofen at pharmacies both in tablet and gel form. There is less risk of side-effects with the gel, however, the amount of the drug that gets into the bloodstream is much less than with tablets and it is important that you use enough gel.

## Please remember

Avoid **HARM** for 72 hours after injury. That is, avoid:

- **H**eat, for example, hot baths, saunas, heat packs. Heat encourages blood flow, so, should be avoided when inflammation is developing. However, after about 72 hours, no further inflammation is likely to develop and heat can then be soothing.
- **A**lcohol drinks which can increase bleeding and swelling and decrease healing.

- **R**unning or any other activity that uses the affected part of the body, which may cause further damage
- **M**assage which may increase bleeding and swelling. However as with heat, after about 72 hours, gentle massage may be soothing.

**If you are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 10 days, we advise you to contact your GP or return to the Emergency Department/MIU department where you were seen.**

**If you are at all concerned about your injury please contact the relevant Emergency Department/Minor Injury Unit (MIU):**

**Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056**

**Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873 732073**

**Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) MIU 01443 802353 or 802349**

**Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318**

**References:**

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/self-management-advice/elbow-problems>

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/sprains-and-strains#!scenario>

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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**